
Please Repair My Book

Some things to think about *before* you talk to the binder or conservator.

Why is this book important to me?

Books serve many purposes in our lives. Careful thought why a particular book is important to you can help you define what repair or treatment will best satisfy your needs.

Working value. A working book is one you read and use, probably a great deal. The binding is less important to you than the content of the book and the appearance of the binding less than its function.

A bookbinder can rebind a working book in sturdy buckram (book cloth). Often the book can be rebound without resewing; if sections or pages have come loose, there will be additional expense for repair to the pages, resewing, or other consolidation of the leaf attachment. If the paper is brittle, it won't be strong enough to re sew; consider having a photocopy made on good quality paper and binding the copy.

Investment value. Collectors' items, rare books, fine printing and fine bindings can have considerable monetary value.

It is the owner's responsibility to investigate the monetary value of a book *before* coming to a decision about its repair. Collectors' markets have their own quirks and prejudices: while a neat, professional repair may enhance the value of some books, any repair at all may actually detract from the value of others. Talk to dealers who specialize in this particular genre of book. Rare book librarians at university or large public libraries can help you find directories of dealers and published price lists for rare books. If you are still unsure, putting the book in an archival box for storage is always a safe decision.

Personal value. Not all old books have market value, but a specific volume may have value to you because of its association with people or events that are important to you. You may be con-

cerned that the book survive so future generations of your family can enjoy both the book and a sense of personal connection with the past.

Keep in mind, especially with books of personal value, that the presence of damage is not necessarily a compelling reason to repair. Damage, even inept repairs from the past, often tells its own tale of how the book has been used and loved and is part of its history. Consider also that the complete conservation or restoration of a book can be a very expensive undertaking; your best investment may be in an appropriate box that will keep the book and any loose parts together and protected from light, dust, and jostling.

What can be done?

Following are definitions of work that a binder may produce. Rarely does a single binder provide all the range of products listed below and any particular binder's definition of these terms may vary from what is written here. Be sure to talk with the binder about his or her work and, if possible, ask to see examples.

Preservation photocopy. In some books the paper is so brittle or fragile that it can not support rebinding or repair. A good option to preserve the content of a book is a preservation photocopy: the text is photocopied or scanned and printed onto good quality paper and the photocopy is then bound into book form.

Box or protective enclosure. Boxes for books are typically made in a drop-spine or clamshell structure: the top and bottom trays are connected at the spine so the whole is one piece that opens flat. Avoid slip cases, which do not protect the spine of the book and create a risk of damage from the difficulty of pulling the book out of the case. More expensive boxes are made from binder's board covered with leather or book cloth; less expensive boxes are made from thinner boards or

high quality corrugated cardboard folded and cut to shape. The materials used to make the box should be alkaline and durable; avoid boxes made from wood, which produces acids that will stain or deteriorate the book. The box should be made to fit the book exactly, so the book does not slide and bump around inside it. If an exact fit is not possible, pad the box with alkaline tissue paper sold by suppliers of products for archival storage or with polyester felt from a local fabric store (avoid wool felt, which may attract moths).

Rebinding. The existing cover, boards, and endsheets are stripped off the book and a new cover fitted on. Typically the new cover material is book cloth, although leather or paper may also be used for all or part of the new binding. If the sewing and text block of the book are solid and in good condition, a new binding can be fitted without resewing. Damage to the paper or sewing of the text block will involve extra expense in repair and/or resewing. If the paper of the book is very fragile or brittle, it may not be practical to repair it or attach a new binding: the book will simply fall apart again in a short space of time because the paper has failed.

Fine binding. The book is rebound, or bound for the first time, in a binding of skilled and decorative craftsmanship. Fine bindings are typically covered in leather, usually with gold or black decorative lines and motifs stamped on the spine and sides. Endsheets are usually marbled or other decorative papers. **Design bindings** are created by an artist who uses book covers as his or her canvas. While design bindings are traditionally executed in leather with leather onlays and tooling to create color and forms, contemporary artist binders often work with cloth, metal, and other materials. The design is often evocative of the content of the book. The binding is a work of art and has its own value as such.

Repair. Parts of the original binding are retained while new materials are set into areas that have failed (e.g. the joints, hinges, headcaps, or corners) to make the binding functional again. One of the most common repairs is a **rebacking**; new leather or cloth is set around the spine to create new joints for the book and a new spine onto which the old spine (if it exists) is attached. Depending on the nature and condition of the original material, a repair may be weaker or more limited functionally than a rebinding. Repairs may serve either the conservation or the restoration of the book.

Conservation. Conservation aims to preserve as much of the original binding as possible while reducing risks of future damage. Methods are selected that will permit the book to be repaired again in the future, should that become necessary, with as little damage to original material as possible. New materials are chosen for their functional qualities and durability rather than exact match of substance or appearance to the old material. While new material may be gently toned to harmonize with its surroundings, repairs are not disguised and decorative elements are not reproduced.

Restoration. Restoration aims to return the book to its original appearance: original parts of the binding are used if they are intact; damaged parts may be cut away and new material of similar type and appearance substituted. The new material is selected, colored, and textured to look like the old; decorative elements that have been lost are reconstructed.

Pastiche binding. The book is rebound in materials, style, and design that imitates practices of another time or place, typically of the date and origin of the book. A pastiche becomes a forgery if the binding is represented as original to the time and place it imitates.

Who repairs books?

Bookbinders. Bookbinders bind books; the term may describe anything from copy shops that do plastic comb binding to publishers' binderies to book artists. For binding, repair, or restoration of single volumes you will need a hand binder. Check the Yellow Pages under "Bookbinders" or ask at local libraries, archives, or historical institutions for referrals.

Library binders. There are companies across the country that specialize in machine-assisted hand binding of books for libraries; many, although not all, will also rebind single books for individuals. If library-style rebinding is appropriate for your book, a library binder is likely to provide the least expensive option. The Library Binding Institute, based in Chicago (312-704-5020; <http://www.lbibinders.org/>), maintains lists of their members, including certified library binders who follow national standards for library binding.

Conservators. Book conservators are binders; they also have training in the history and materials science of book construction as well as in the

chemical and physical factors that cause books to deteriorate. There is at present no certification or standard qualification for conservators in the United States. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) maintains an online referral list of members who are available to contract for conservation work at <http://www.conservation-us.org/> (follow the link under “Resource Center” to “Selecting a Conservator”). This list is searchable (by type of object—book, furniture, painting, etc.) and by region. This site also has a useful brochure describing the client/conservator relationship. Staff at libraries holding rare books or special collections may also be able to refer you to book conservation specialists in your area.

What will it cost?

The hourly rate for a binder’s or conservator’s work ranges widely from around \$50/hour to well over \$100/hour for a specialist conservator or artist. Location and other market factors will also influence costs. Rarely does a hand binding or repair job take less than an hour, unless the book is one of a batch of like bindings. Typically the time is between two and ten hours. Treatment or repair of the paper, resewing, and complex repairs or restoration can increase the time significantly. Materials for binding and repair are relatively inexpensive compared to the costs of labor; special materials such as leather, vellum, or decorative papers, however, can add significantly to the cost.

Library and trade binders are usually set up for greatest efficiency and thus lowest cost; however cost efficiencies gained by highly standardized production or use of inferior materials may not produce the results you seek. Experience is important: an experienced binder charging a high hourly rate may in the long run prove cheaper than a binder with less experience charging a lower rate. Ask about rates and costs up front but understand that the binder will need to examine the book itself and discuss possible options with you before he or she can make a cost estimate.

Pre-made, standard-sized book boxes cost about \$4 to \$20, depending on size and materials. Custom-sized boxes cost from about \$10 to \$20 for a machine-cut box from alkaline corrugated board to \$75 and up for a custom box made from binders’ board and book cloth.

Buyer Beware!

In all cases it will be your responsibility to talk with the person who will work on your book. Use the information above to help define what sort of service you are seeking. Explain what is important to you about the book and the results you expect. Ask to see samples of similar bindings or repairs. Depending on the value of the book and/or how much you wish to control your risks, take the time to ask about training, to discuss the binder’s philosophy of repair, and to check references. Ask what materials will be used: are they durable, resistant to deterioration themselves and not likely to cause damage? Ask for (and expect to pay for) a written proposal detailing what will be done.

Finally, make sure you get a written estimate of both cost and time for the work and ask what procedure will be followed if either estimate is likely to be exceeded. During the treatment the binder may find problems that were not immediately apparent at first evaluation; discuss how and when you wish to be informed if such problems arise. Understand, too, that most binders have significant backlogs of work; ask for a realistic estimate of when the work will be done and express clearly any deadlines or needs you may have.

Glossary

Acid-free. Describes paper and paperboard that has a pH of 7.0 or higher. Often used loosely for “alkaline” or “buffered.”

Adhesive binding. Leaf attachment of single, unfolded, sheets by adhesive only; also called “perfect binding.” Commonly seen on commercial paperbacks and bestseller hardback bindings.

Alkaline. Describes paper and paperboard that has a pH over 7.0. Alkaline papers and paperboards have a substance (usually calcium carbonate) added as a buffer, to neutralize acids that are present or that may develop in the paper in the future.

ANSI Z39.50-1992. American National Standards Institute standard on *Permanence of Paper for Publications and Documents in Libraries and Archives*. Select papers that meet this standard for printing, documents, or copies where long-term preservation is desired.

Archival or archival quality. Often used to describe a material or product is permanent, durable, and/or chemically stable; there is no standard, however, that defines just how long a product of “archival quality” can be expected to last.

Binder’s board. Typically a stiff paperboard, made for use as the hard core of a hardcover binding.

Brittle. Describes paper that breaks when flexed because of acid-induced deterioration of the paper fibers.

Buckram. Heavy book cloth, traditionally woven from cotton fiber and stiffened with starch.

Buffer. See *Alkaline*.

Clamshell box. Same as *Drop-spine box*.

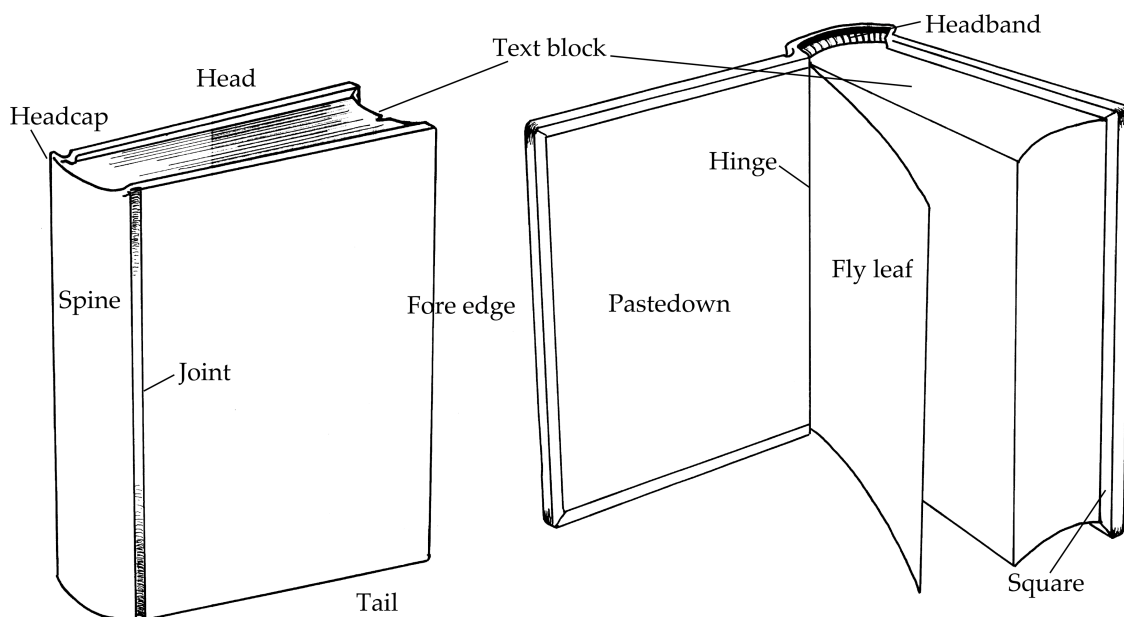
Drop-spine box. A one-piece book box with two trays that open flat, hinged at the spine.

Leaf attachment. The method for securing the leaves of a book, e.g. by sewing or with adhesive.

Sewing. Leaf attachment by means of thread passing through the paper of a book.

Slip case. A five-sided book box constructed with the spine open, by which the book is slid in and out of the case.

Text block. The gathered and attached leaves of a book, exclusive of the cover.



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May 2011